



THE LAST SHAMAN

Running Time: 80 minutes

Color

Language: English and Spanish with English subtitles

www.thelastshaman.com

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Present

THE LAST SHAMAN

Executive Producers

JOHN BATTSEK, LUCA ARGENTERO, LAPO ELKHANN,
FRANCESCO MELZI, ANDREA SALVETTI, GIANCARLO CANAVESIO
RAN MOR RON ROFE

Original Music By

LASSE MOSGARD

Edited By

MARCELLO PEREGO, ILANA GOLDSCHMIDT RUGER, RAZ DEGAN

Cinematographers

RAZ DEGAN, NICOLAS LANDA TAMI

Produced By

NADAV SCHIRMAN, ARIEL VROMEN, DANNY A ABECKASER

Written Directed and Produced By

RAZ DEGAN

DIRECTORS STATEMENT

In 2010, after wrapping a film in Tajikistan I stayed behind walk on the south Silk Road. As French military planes had arrived to take all the cast and crew home, the thought of crossing Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Western China by myself on foot with nothing but one bag and two cameras sounded like an experience and I couldn't resist. At the time in Italy I was an actor and host of my own show televising world mysteries and was imagining a new life for myself. After two months on the road I ended up on the salt route connecting Nepal and Tibet. I was able to enjoy visiting some the most remote villages of the world. I was quickly swept away by the scenery, people, and culture. My spirit soared high though the conditions at such high altitude started to take a toll on me physically. I began developing symptoms of pneumonia, was running a fever and I could barely breathe. At that time I called my brother, he suggested for me to get off the mountain and come to Goa at sea level. There was a Shaman there he said that could help get me well with Ayahuasca. I had never tried it before though medicine and its effects had been sparking my interest for sometime. I was willing to try anything to get better, also I hoped it would give me some more clarity as to what to do next. I wasn't sure if I wanted to continue my life as it stood in Italy, I knew there was a bigger purpose but didn't know where.

Shortly after a plane ride away I managed to get off the mountains and safely land in Goa. I was introduced to the Shaman, she arranged for me to sit solo for the next 6 nights drinking the tea. The second day purging my infection and everything that was blocking me from breathing, I was running on the beach and feeling my vital life force within again. During the ceremonies, I revisited my very own birth and was taken into my mother's pain body. She had been battling from a bit of depression for a while and I wanted to help her. I was also curious to see how my mother being a doctor with a degree in western medicine would respond to this alternative way of healing. Soon after I returned home, she accepted an invitation to join me in Italy for a retreat arranged just for us. It was obvious the medicine helped her. She felt stronger physically, was back to sailing, best of all she was smiling again. After seeing the changes in my mother and myself there was no other choice then for me to investigate further.

Not long after that I left Italy, quit my job and declined offers as an actor. I knew what I wanted to do. It was time to share what I had witnessed and experienced with the world. I went directly to the source in Ucayali River found the Shipibo tribe, and thus my adventure with the film began. To my surprise 5 years later the story is now ready to be shared.

Raz Degan 12/31/16

EVOLUTION OF THE LAST SHAMAN

At the beginning I set out to film how the healing magic of Ayahuasca could potentially save the world. The sacred knowledge of this plant and its healing modalities are undeniable. The tribal customs and healing I witnessed take place during ceremony blew my mind. At such a pivotal moment of uncertainty for many suffering around the world I wanted to expose how these tribal traditions could help humanity. I found myself seduced not only by the plants ability to heal but by those serving the plant as well. That all changed after one night where I witnessed a man die during ceremony.

Up until then, I had only been looking at this subject from one vantage point, and it became apparent there was much more to uncover about the world rotating around Ayahuasca. Its ever growing popularity and the power a Shaman could gain over people, tourists, and the villages was frightening. For a Shaman is none other than a human being, not a God to be worshipped and idolized. I stepped out of the centers and started to walk the streets and visit markets in the local villages where Ayahuasca was being bottled in jars and sold as a cure all. So many blurred lines around me I began to question my own presence there taken record of all this. My role changed from participant to observer and I began understand how my own being there could potentially affect the equilibrium and balance of this region of the world. I remember contemplating the thought of bringing anti-parasite shampoo to this village with the intention to assist. In one respect it would save the women sitting by the river the trouble of picking the ticks out of their hair and yet at the same time it would potentially destroy a thousand year old tradition. I was dealing with something that was holy yet at the same time I was exploiting its sacredness. What was I uncovering? Where was the magic in all this? As all these questions began to flood my thoughts, I gained the insight. The film must not only show Ayahuasca's effect on me, but my affect on Ayahuasca and the world it comes from.

In conclusion the film is intentionally left open for discussion. While I did want to expose the beauty of this plant and its' alternative way to healing, it's not only about western versus plant medicines. As I broaden the vantage point around this hot topic of Ayahuasca much more surfaced for the viewer to take in. The plant only needs water and light and it's free, yet the commercialization of it is causing its end, hence the name The Last Shaman.

SYNOPSIS OF THE LAST SHAMAN

A young man named James decides to take matters in his own hands when facing suicide. From the outside looking in he is living the all American dream. Though behind closed doors James has no desire to live. He travels to the Amazon rain forest with one mission at hand, saving his own life. Without knowing any of the dangers that lies ahead of him he starts searching for a Shaman who can help him. Along his journey James faces different obstacles and life threatening experiences on his road towards finding redemption. He must come to acknowledge the space inside himself he struggles to understand. After undergoing various forms of treatments from the tribal plants medicines he is faced with the consequences of his own actions. He undergoes a life changing experience in the jungle that brings him a deeper of understanding and acceptance of self.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

A young man decides to take matters in his own hands when facing suicide. He undergoes a life-threatening journey in the Amazon jungle that brings him a deeper of understanding and acceptance of self.

OBJECTIVE

The goal of this documentary is to show that the changes we care to make within ourselves are not achievable by any external entity. What we strive to reach for truly exists inside us all. In our modern day society and throughout history we have labeled, diagnosed, and institutionalized those based on a state of mind. Diagnosing symptoms rather than getting to the cause. Depression is a widespread global epidemic. Over 350 million people suffer from depression worldwide. I have first hand watched those closest to me deal with severe trauma and loss. Constantly struggling to be happy given their present set of circumstances. I chose to uncover the way people live and treat mental illness from different tribes in South America that don't exist anywhere else. So much of what is in the chemical make up of prescribed over the counter medications are from plants growing in this scared land of the Amazon. We negate that there are cultures that still live very connected to this sacred space on earth. In this doc we unveil the truth behind what is involved in taking these plant medicines. Similar to warning labels that come on any over the counter medications there are warnings that these alternative treatments should not be taken recreationally or without proper supervision. I am not an advocate of any one cure. I feel it's too hard to tell if a situation is bio chemical or situational. After spending four years travelling among these tribes and witnessing hundreds ceremonial healing practices I was able to gain an understanding that there is a much deeper healing process involved that can't be sold in a jar. There is no one pill, place, person, or thing that exists outside ourselves that can heal what plagues us within. When we step outside the bubble of society and set aside the pressures we put on ourselves to achieve a high level of success we see there is a whole world out there. There is so much we can learn from nature and all the healing modalities it lends to us. Most of all how it endures change. No matter what disaster strikes the sun still rises and shines among us all everyday. As circumstances change around us we must still ground ourselves in knowing each of us has the power within to transform our very own lives. The film opens with the quote by Jiddu Krishnamurti, a brilliant philosopher and of the greatest thinkers and teachers of all time, constantly stressed the need for a revolution in the psyche of every human.

“In oneself lies the whole world and if you know how to look and learn the door is there and the key is in your hand. Nobody on earth can give you either the key or the door to open. Except Yourself.”-
Jiddu Krishnamurti

MEETING JAMES

It took a while before James became the solo subject of the film. I interviewed numerous patients Shamans and apprentices. Something about this kid kept me coming back to him. His ability to articulate himself and his sensitivity to the world around him made him relatable. He had all the ingredients I was looking for that could tell a story. His background growing up and the procedures he went through to take away his pain, gave me the eastern vs western school of thought that I wanted to capture. I remember asking James if he was interested in being in the film, I told him that him sharing his story might just be the key to his own resolution he was looking for. James accepted the offer and was brave enough to allow me to penetrate his most intimate experiences on a physical, emotional and spiritual level. I am so thankful to him and his family for their willingness to uncover such a delicate and intimate matter as expressed in the film.

MEETING PEPE

From the beginning of meeting Pepe among all the other Shamans I met along my five years travelling he certainly stood out to me. There was a silent power within in him, an air of humility that he was a true server of this plant medicine. He wasn't taken by the greed of what this plant would bring him. His devotion was to healing and honoring the Ayahuasca plant and all its powers. It was shortly after knowing him I knew that he must be part of this film.

IMAGE CAPTURE AND EDITING PROCESS

Due to the intimate subject matter and the close relationship I develop with my subjects I prefer to work alone most of the time. I shot parts of this film solo, though I did have a second shooter Nic for some scenes and so thankful I did. There were many things I learned along the way this being my first feature film. It became apparent later on that having Nic there would not only allow me to focus more on directing, but also start to facilitate the editing process to come. I shot all of the film using a Canon EOS 5D Mark II and Mark III camera. For the interviews I used the Canon 50mm 1.2 and at times the 70-X200 2.8. My first thought was to give the film more of a handheld feel though later I adapted a more stable cinematic approach. All in all I shot roughly a total of 350 hours. The challenges I faced shooting this film mostly had to do with the environment and weather. Due to the humid conditions of the Amazon Rainforest I found myself battling condensation on the lenses. I often had to stop shooting open up the lenses and wait for the humidity to evaporate. During heavy monsoons, while travelling down the river by boat it was an extreme challenge to find shelter in order to keep the equipment dry. Also the lack of electricity in the jungle was another obstacle. I used solar power batteries and kept a large supply of charged batteries on hand. The ceremonies were also not the easiest to capture. The traditional ceremonies are done in the dark so it was tricky to film. I shot roughly 50 ceremonies in different areas with different people. In order not to disturb the subjects I needed to gain the trust of the participants and also the Shamans before filming such a sensitive subject matter. I didn't want to use an infrared filter so I played around in the dark with a headlamp I had with me. I was able to find a way to sit without disrupting the nature of the ceremony. This is how I managed to get that red light effect in all of the ceremonial shots.

The editing process was also another huge undertaking. The amount of noise we picked up on in the Amazon was unreal. My initial attention was mostly focused on the picture and images. My lack of attention to the amount of sound I was picking up turned out to be a huge mistake. I tried different techniques to avoid picking up the constant humming from birds, bugs and other animals in the jungle. I developed the story and it became alive in the editing room. During post I returned to Peru several times to gather additional material. I worked with 10 editors in 5 counties and it took nearly two years to complete. This largely had to do with my own personal relationship with Ayahuasca as the topic has become increasingly popular, the perspective I wanted to take on the subject matter evolved as well.

JAMES HARRINGTON FREEMAN (22)

Descendant of WW II admiral, son of Harvard educated doctors, a graduate of Philips Academy and Middlebury, James is the all American boy. He can fly a plane speak Chinese, was a soccer MVP, and just until a few years ago his ambition was to become a leader in politics. His internal drive always made him push the limits, study harder, train more, and to be better prepared for any task he took on. Though nothing could prepare him for the battle he faced with depression, when he was clinically diagnosed. James went to the best psychiatrists and psychologists took Prozac, and Xanax but nothing helped cure him. In a fit of deep despair James admitted himself for electro shock therapy (ECT), and that too didn't change his dim outlook on his life and the world. After hearing about the healing effects of the medicinal plant Ayahuasca, James decided to embark on a new journey. When he lands in Peru he moves from one healing center to the next seeking a Shaman and try the "sacred brew". He undergoes complete isolation in the jungle for 5 months and courageously shares his most intimate experiences as he attempts to heal his soul.

DR. SHERYL HARRINGTON & DR. MASON FREEMAN (50)

JAMES PARENTS AND SENIOR DOCTORS AT MASS. GENERAL HOSPITAL BOSTON

Mason had never heard of Ayahuasca and had only a vague notion of what a Shaman was until James dove into that world. Firmly rooted in the western school of thought in regards to medicine and science Mason is very weary of James trying the Ayahuasca plant. He doesn't believe it will relieve James of his depression and most of his medical colleagues have warned Mason that his son's journey could be very harmful and potentially dangerous.

Sheryl is an internal medicine specialist, who understands the scientific effects of the plant. Although she believes the plants active ingredients could have a positive "healing effect" on James she is fearful. Her fear mostly lies in who exactly James will find there to administer the medicine and how trustworthy, credible, and responsible that person will be with her son's life.

PEPE (44)

Pepe is a former fisherman who after being healed by Ayahuasca, became a Shipibo Shaman. He honors the plants sacred knowledge and its tribal tradition of ceremony. He refuses to be part of the money driven centers that are taking over his village. "In the old times it would take you 10 years to be a Shaman" – says Pepe who was forced to leave his village after the Aya-business took over. "Today they make you a Shaman after 6 months so they can have more healers for the gringos who come here." His refusal to work for one of the "gringo centers" has left him no other choice then to find an alternative source of income to feed his family. He wanders the favelas in Lima offering healing to those in need.

GRINGO SHAMAN - RON (55)

Ron is an ex-conman from Kentucky, who started the first Western Ayahuasca Center in Iquitos. His true passion is cock- fighting, he breeds rooster year around and trains them to kill. Ron was the first to sell Ayahuasca brew over the Internet shipping thousands of bottles across the globe; often bypassing illegal drugs trade acts through religious pretense.

RAZ DEGAN – DIRECTOR, PRODUCER, WRITER, CINEMATOGRAPHER

Raz Degan is an actor, director and cinematographer, born on a Kibbutz in Israel. While acting he worked with acclaimed directors in the industry such as Oliver Stone, Julie Taymor, Robert Altman and along side the Italian maestro Ermanno Olmi. As a cinematographer he was involved with documentary "The Green Prince", which won the Audience Award for World Cinema – at Sundance. Raz was also nominated for several awards for his cinematography. His love for adventure has led him to more than 100 countries in the past two decades. In 2011, while traveling through the Amazon he began his directorial debut shooting The Last Shaman. When not actively engaged in producing documentaries, Raz is also know for his photography that has appeared in various magazines and earned him several exhibitions world wide.

NADAV SCHIRMAN - PRODUCER

Nadav Schirman is an internationally acclaimed director, writer and producer. He recently directed the first episode of Netflix series CAPTIVE, and is set to direct a geo-political thriller for Alcon Entertainment. His film THE GREEN PRINCE, won of the Audience Award in the “World Documentary Competition” at Sundance IFF, the Best Documentary Feature at the 2014 Israeli Academy Awards and was nominated for the PGA Awards. Schirman produced through his Frankfurt based A List Films in collaboration with Oscar winning producers John Battsek and Simon Chinn.

ARIEL VROMEN - PRODUCER

Ariel Vromen is an acclaimed filmmaker with over 10 years in the entertainment industry, and is the creative force behind numerous projects for major production entities such as Lionsgate/ Summit, Millennium Films and Warner Brothers. Vromen wrote, produced and directed the critically acclaimed feature film "The Iceman", starring Michael Shannon, Winona Ryder and James Franco, as well as Ray Liotta, Chris Evans and Stephen Dorff. Vromen's last movie "Criminal" also featured an all-star cast including Kevin Costner, Gary Oldman, Tommy Lee Jones, Gal Gadot, Alice Eve, Michael Pitt and Ryan Reynolds.

JOHN BATTSEK - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

John Battsek is a British documentary film producer who manages the film department at Passion Pictures. His fist Passion Pictures film was One Day in September in 1999. Battsek was nominated for PGA Award in 2010 and in 2011 for Sergio and the Tillman Story, respectively. He received the Grierson Trustees Award for Outstanding Contribution to Documentary.

LUCA ARGENTERO - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Luca Argentero, is an italian actor and producer. After achieving a degree in Economics at *Università degli Studi di Torino*, started working as a model and appeared in local commercials. In 2003 was casted for "Carabinieri", a popular television series, where he played the character of Marco Tosi untill 2006. In 2006 he began his film career by starring in Cristina Comencini "A casa nostra" and in Ferzan Ozpetek "Saturno Contro". Since then he starred in more than 30 movies, working with directors as Marco Risi, Michele Placido and Claudio Amendola. In 2010 played beside Julia Roberts and Ryan Murphy "Eat, pray, love". In the same year he began his activity as a producer founding Inside Productions, by which films, documentaries and television series have been realized.

GIANCARLO CANAVESIO - EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Giancarlo Canavesio- is an Italian film producer, investment banker, and entrepreneur. He is best known and founder and CEO of Magusta Risk. Mangusta Productions and Magnu.tv. He has produced several award-winning feature films including The Living Wake, FIX, Being in the World, 2012 Time for Change, Starlet, and Neurons to Nirvana. He also worked on producing the soon to be released films Monogamy and Its Discontents, and Weed the People. Giancarlo decided to focus on exploring documentaries to expand awareness on important topics to a wider audience through Magnu.tv.